

## Greater Gallatin United Way

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[greatergallatinunitedway.org](http://greatergallatinunitedway.org)



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December 10, 2018

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary  
Office of the Secretary  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Re: WC Docket No. 18-336 and CC Docket No. 92-105 regarding the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018.

Dear Madam,

Greater Gallatin United Way (GGUW) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the current effort undertaken by the Federal Communications Commission to study the feasibility of designating a three-digit number to the National Suicide Hotline and to assess the effectiveness of the current National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Based in Bozeman, Montana and serving 4 surrounding counties, our United Way is fighting for the health, education and financial stability by investing in 2-1-1, ensuring basic needs are available to our most vulnerable community members (such as food, housing, child care, transportation), early childhood literacy, afterschool programming, senior stability and improving behavioral health / mental well-being for all.

We acknowledge efforts are needed to create a safe place for all people to call – especially underserved or marginalized populations such as seniors, people with physical or intellectual disabilities, people that identify as LGBTQ+, Veterans, American Natives, non-English speakers, and individuals facing complex problems such as substance/opioid use, human trafficking, and domestic violence. GGUW has a 40-year history of reaching out to the underserved and today we partner with 55+ businesses, 60+ nonprofit agencies, and government stakeholders at the city, county, state, and federal level to drive systemic changes to solve our community's toughest problems like mental health, addictions, and crises.

Today, we hosted a legislative luncheon on behavioral health. Montana has the highest rate of suicide – nearly double the national average rate. One in 10 Bozeman high school students have attempted suicide. As part of our program today, we shared our vision that people will know 2-1-1 as well as they know 9-1-1 and that our 24/7/365 call center will expand to help prevent more suicides.

EIN: 81-0384820

Mission: To improve lives by mobilizing the caring power of our communities



We encourage the FCC to consider our 2-1-1 work here in southwest Montana/Greater Gallatin as a vital partner in increasing access to suicide prevention and intervention services. Since the FCC designation of 2-1-1 in 2000, and Montana's adoption of 2-1-1 in 2006, we have invested \$532,000 to the success of our local 2-1-1. Our local 2-1-1 is operated through our non-profit partner, The Help Center, who was and still is the major champion of 2-1-1's establishment in our state. The Help Center answered 16,455 requests for help in 2017.

With Greater Gallatin United Way's increased focus on behavioral health and suicide prevention, we would like to see the number of 2-1-1/Help Center calls double annually over the next 5 years. We will focus on promoting our local 2-1-1 as the major resource referral and call center support for suicide prevention, education on signs and symptoms of addiction and mental illness, because we know that it is less traumatic and less costly for people to call earlier (before their situation reaches a crisis) for assistance. Our 2-1-1 through The Help Center serves 13 counties, and currently answers all "800" numbers for suicide prevention, human trafficking, and addiction support. The call center staff is trained for suicide prevention and call/text support for behavioral health support and referral. Greater Gallatin United Way also invests more than \$1.5M annually in mental health, substance use, health, education, and other financial stability services. These critical investments position us to be key partners in the success of an improved mental health and crisis response system.

Another three-digit code will likely erode the simplicity of a single point of access for community help. Despite concerted efforts by numerous social services, and multiple hotlines, in our community to educate and market the distinctions, a person in crisis will likely always reach for the most familiar or most accessible number. Our 211 receives calls that are better suited for 911, and our 911 partners often receive calls that we can best answer. We recommend that resources should be invested to improve a unified single point of access with a blended partnership of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and United Way's 211 services. We believe in the power of partnership to address gaps, not duplicate services, and will be a valuable partner in the fight against suicide.

You can learn more about our work at [www.greatergallatinunitedway.org](http://www.greatergallatinunitedway.org) and can reach my office for additional questions or discussion at 406-587-2194. Thank you for your time in addressing this important issue and for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Danica Jamison  
President and CEO  
Greater Gallatin United Way